

FINDINGS: The Chinese government strictly controls all religious practice and represses religious activity outside state-approved organizations. Some Chinese citizens can assemble to worship and conduct charitable projects within government-approved parameters. Unregistered religious groups, or those deemed by the government to threaten national security or social harmony, face severe violations, including fines, confiscation of property, imprisonment, and the destruction of religious sites. Religious freedom conditions for Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims are the worst they have been in the past ten years. After demonstrations and riots in 2008 and 2009, the Chinese government increased efforts to weaken religious devotion, discredit and imprison religious leaders, and ban religious gatherings and “illegal religious literature” in Tibetan and Uighur areas. Almost four hundred unregistered Protestants were detained in the past year and the Chinese government stepped up efforts to destroy churches and close “illegal” meeting points. Unregistered Catholic clergy and Falun Gong adherents remain in detention, in home confinement, under surveillance, or have disappeared. Detained Falun Gong adherents are tortured and mistreated. In addition, Chinese officials harassed, detained, physically abused, and in the prominent case of Gao Zhisheng, forcibly “disappeared” attorneys who defended Falun Gong, Tibetans, Uighurs, and unregistered Protestants.

Because of these systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, USCIRF recommends in 2010 that China again be designated as a “country of particular concern”, or CPC. The State Department has designated China as a CPC since 1999.

Religious adherence continues to grow rapidly in China. Hundreds of millions of Chinese manifest their belief openly. Senior-level government officials, including President Hu Jintao, have praised the positive role of religious communities and articulated a desire for religious groups to promote “economic and social development.” At the same time, the government has issued directives warning against foreign groups “using religion” to “interfere” in Chinese affairs, supported an extralegal security force to suppress the activities of so-called cult organizations, and severely restricted online access to religious information and the rights of parents to teach their children religion. Chinese officials are increasingly adept at employing the language of human rights and the rule of law to defend repression of religious communities, citing purported national security concerns or using Chinese law to restrict rather than advance universal freedoms.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS: Religious freedom is a bellwether issue in U.S.-China relations, encompassing issues including the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the well-being of ethnic minorities. Promoting religious freedom in China is a vital U.S. interest that can positively affect the United States' future security, economic, and political relations with China. As part of China's CPC designation, USCIRF urges the Secretary of State to impose a new sanction targeting officials who perpetuate religious freedom abuses or provinces where religious freedom conditions are most egregious. In addition, USCIRF recommends that the U.S. raise religious freedom concerns in multilateral fora where the U.S. and China are members, coordinate potential sources of leverage within the U.S. government and with allies to build a consistent human rights diplomacy with China, develop and distribute proven technologies to counter Internet censorship and protect Chinese activists from arrest and harassment, and raise religious freedom and negotiate binding human rights agreements at the U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy towards China can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on China and by following this link: <http://www.uscirt.gov/images/ar2010/china2010.pdf>